

# Family Health History Is Important!

**“I view family health history as back to the future. It’s the best-kept secret in health.”**

*Dr. Charis Eng, cancer geneticist at the Cleveland Clinic’s Genomic Medicine Institute*



## **What is a family health history?**

A family health history is a record of your family’s health. It contains information about your health and the health of close relatives. If a family member has a serious medical condition or disease, then that information would be included in the family’s health history.

## **Why is it important to know your family health history?**

Certain diseases, such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes, run in families. If one generation has a specific condition, it is not unusual for the next generation to have the same condition. For this reason it is important for you to know your family health history and to share it with your physician. If you know there is a medical condition that runs in your family, there may be health and lifestyle choices that you can make to avoid developing the illness. At the very least, knowledge of your family’s health history can aid in early diagnosis and treatment.

## **How can you learn about your family health history?**

Talk to family members about their health and whether they have had a serious medical condition or disease. Ask when medical conditions were detected. Find out about the health histories of deceased relatives. Family celebrations or holidays—such as Thanksgiving—are perfect times to gather health information.

## **Why is newborn screening important for young families?**

If you are a new parent or expecting a child, you have probably heard about newborn screening. The State of Illinois requires that all babies be screened for a panel of genetic disorders. The Illinois Department of Public Health administers the testing. A simple blood test can determine whether a child has a genetic disorder. Early detection in some cases can prevent developmental delays or death.



For useful online information, visit [www.easylearngenetics.net](http://www.easylearngenetics.net).

For an easy-to-use online family history tool, visit <https://familyhistory.hhs.gov>.

More information is available through the IDPH Genetics Program at 217-785-8101.

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